

Another Night, Another Heart by deandratb

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Summary:

Post-S1 Hopper POV; when casual sex gets complicated. *Over the course of his life so far, Hopper might have met quite a few women who were interested in casual sex, but there wasn't one he'd ever met who would sleep with him if she knew he was thinking about somebody else.*

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Author's Note:

Rated teen solely for use of language. Earlier disclaimer still applies: I haven't seen S2 yet, so if anything is not canon-compliant, it's purely by accident and I'm unaware of it.

He really likes women.

He always has. Ditching high school to fuck pretty girls in the backseat was just a sign of good priorities, in Hopper's opinion--certainly a better use of his time back then than quadratic equations.

Settling down eventually, becoming a dedicated family man, wasn't difficult--he loved his wife and his daughter so damn much, it was never even a question.

But the hole that Sara's death dug into him, he's never been able to fill it back in. He tried volunteering first, thinking that helping other people's kids would ease the pain and the guilt.

When that just sharpened the ache in his heart, and he started to feel a bitter detachment toward every child who was luckier than his perfect little girl...that was when he turned to alcohol.

It didn't ease the pain, but it dulled it. It dulled everything, including him--the last straw on the back of his broken marriage.

Losing his wife, all but chasing her away, left him free to try whatever he wanted in her wake. And he let the hole swallow him up, for a while.

Taking the job in Hawkins required him to function, but managing to rise to the level of functional alcoholic wasn't that hard. Nothing ever happened in his hometown; little was demanded of him.

Until he walked into his office one morning, donut in hand, and found a pale, trembling, **furious** Joyce Byers waiting for him.

While he pieced the puzzle of her missing son together, Hopper remembered how to demand more from himself. Because she did.

He wasn't proud of the trail of warm, sated bodies he'd left in his wake after he first arrived in town. He wasn't ashamed, either, but he couldn't say it was his finest form of self-medicating.

The problem, as he saw it, wasn't with meaningless sex. Sex was great, full stop--as long as everybody knew the rules. And maybe he was less clear in the beginning, when he was still stinging after the divorce, with the women he took to his bed.

He tries to pick bedmates more carefully now, players who understand the game. He tries to make his peace with the ones he hurt.

Mostly, though, he just tries to avoid them. It's better for everybody that way.

And above all, he doesn't get attached. That hole inside him, he can't afford to make it deeper; he doesn't know how close to the edge he'll find himself standing on any given day.

So feelings beyond the physical, he keeps a tight grip on those. It's a reflex, a survival skill he's honed more acutely than anything he learned as a Scout. He'll happily screw willing women, but he refuses to love them.

That was never an issue before.

Joyce demanded trust and belief and dedication, she pulled at him until he gave, and while they were fighting to save her boy, Hopper got it all turned upside down.

He's never fucked her, despite the gossip that reaches him with alarming frequency. He never came close.

But he loves her.

After he woke up in his bugged house, he cut back on the booze. No reason to make it easier for them, now that he knew they were out there ready to take advantage of any weakness.

That just left sex, when he was raw and drowning in memories and wanted to be numb for a while. And even after he got more attention than he wanted saving Will, he still had a couple friends who would scratch that itch.

Only he can't.

Over the course of his life so far, Hopper might have met quite a few women who were interested in casual sex, but there wasn't one he'd ever met who would sleep with him if she knew he was thinking about somebody else.

And he can't stop thinking about Joyce.

The way she smiled through tears when he told her he'd proven her right, surrounded by Christmas lights and stubborn hope. Her eyes meeting his as they uncuffed her in the lab, full of worry not just for her own family, but also for him. The awkward, hesitant hug she gave him in the store, the first time they saw each other again after Will was home safe.

"Thank you," she whispered into his neck, so quietly that nobody else could hear. He carried the feeling of those words around with him for days. They sunk under his skin, burrowing into his heart and making themselves at home there.

They started to fill the hole.

He doesn't know how to live with the destruction of his careful walls, let alone deal with it. Acceptance doesn't come easy.

But if Sara taught him anything, it's that when he loves, he loves hard. Without exceptions, without relief. Love isn't a choice for him, though he sometimes wishes it was...and it can't be buried because it never dies.

So when Joyce stops by to give him a drawing Will made of them in the Upside Down, when Hopper cracks some smartass comment designed to piss her off and get her out of his office and instead she just laughs, pressing her fingers to her mouth like she's surprised to hear the sound--he knows it's far too late.

He can't invite willing women over anymore, because they're not her.

And he can't invite her, because she's got two kids to look after and a life that's held together with duct tape and prayers, and she already knows him too well.

What does that leave him with, if he can't pass out on his couch before dawn or lose himself in someone whose name he barely remembers?

Hell if he knows.

But she's in his path far too often during the course of everyday business now, shining brighter with her son safe again and totally unaware of how hard Hopper tries to keep himself from staring.

It's probably only a matter of time until the town stops insinuating, and starts outright calling him mental, just like Joyce Byers.

In his case, they'll be right.

Because seeing her every day and **not** touching her is driving him crazy.

Author's Note:

Title borrowed from "Barbies" by Pink.